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Podcasts as a medium to support professional development for school nurses

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Abstract

School nurses must continuously update their knowledge and skills to address the evolving health and wellbeing needs of children and young people. Rising issues such as obesity, mental health problems, emerging issues such as vaping, and worries about gender are increasing in prevalence, while the safeguarding of children remains a priority. However, with reduced service capacity and increasing demands, finding time for professional development is a challenge. Podcasts are emerging as a flexible and cost-effective tool for learning. To support school nurses, a series of podcasts were developed covering these critical topics. These podcasts, produced by school nurses for school nurses, offer insights into current challenges and promote best practices, ensuring nurses are better equipped to fulfil their public health roles in prevention, promotion, and protection. This article discusses the development, reception, and impact of these podcasts as an accessible medium for continuous professional learning.

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Conflict of interest statement: None

Podcasts as a medium to support professional development for school nurses

Keywords: School Nurses; Podcasts; Professional Development; Digital learning.

Key Points:

1. A flexible approach to personal and professional learning is important.
2. Using digital solutions such as podcasts provides flexibility and can be engaging.

Reflective questions

1. How do the podcasts you have listened to align with your current practice, and what changes might you implement based on the discussions?
2. What are the key challenges school nurses face today in addressing the mental health needs of young people, and how can digital learning platforms like podcasts support this?
3. How do you think the use of podcasts as a learning tool compares with traditional forms of professional development such as webinars or in-person training?
4. Reflecting on the podcast series, how can school nurses further collaborate to enhance knowledge sharing and the delivery of best practices across regions?

Abstract

School nurses must continuously update their knowledge and skills to address the evolving health and wellbeing needs of children and young people. Rising issues such as obesity, mental health problems, emerging issues such as vaping, and worries about gender are increasing in prevalence, while the safeguarding of children remains a priority. However, with reduced service capacity and increasing demands, finding time for professional development is a challenge. Podcasts are emerging as a flexible and cost-effective tool for learning. To support

school nurses, a series of podcasts were developed covering these critical topics. These podcasts, produced by school nurses for school nurses, offer insights into current challenges and promote best practices, ensuring nurses are better equipped to fulfil their public health roles in prevention, promotion, and protection. This article discusses the development, reception, and impact of these podcasts as an accessible medium for continuous professional learning.

Background

The podcast project was a collaboration between the Digital Health Transformation Service (DHTS) at Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust with project management expertise and a recognised interest in ‘all things digital’ and the School and Public Health Nurses Association (SAPHNA) a professional organisation dedicated to the ongoing development of and achieving excellence in school nursing practice.

Both organisations shared intelligence about the themes and challenges emerging from school nursing practice. The Digital Health Transformation Service at Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust provides the ‘ChatHealth’ text service for a growing number of school nursing services across the UK. This service enables young people to confidentially and anonymously text their school nurse to gain help, support and advice on any health and wellbeing. In addition, DHTS provide websites healthforteens.co.uk and healthforkids.co.uk, which provide reliable and up to date information on a range of health and wellbeing issues. Data is collected and trends are monitored which help identify the type of support that young people are contacting their school nurse about or accessing the websites about. The data showed that one of the top reasons for young people to contact school nurses via ChatHealth messaging is to seek support for their emotional health and wellbeing. In addition, data on the most visited

pages on the Health for Teens websites showed that articles about emotional health, smoking and sexual health were the most popular with visitors. Similarly, SAPHNA heard from school nurses during webinars and special interest groups increasing concern about issues such as the school nurse's role in safeguarding, how schools can effectively respond to concerns about the increase in vaping, a rise in obesity and how to support young people struggling with their mental health and navigating gender issues.

Why is there a need to develop professional development differently?

There has been a change in how professionals engage in professional development since the pandemic which necessitated the use of virtual digital platforms replacing in-person training. SAPHNA responded to this challenge by offering a range of interactive live webinars to support professional development. These were well attended, however, there were often times when participants needed to cancel places or leave webinars early because of workload constraints.

The idea for a podcast aimed at school nurses came from a lively discussion on social media last year. Podcasts have been shown to be a good medium to disseminate information, stimulate debate, explore topical issues and gain detailed and reflective insight into valuable lived experiences (Bedford, 2022). Further exploration by SAPHNA found that there was indeed a strong appetite for a school nursing podcast to aid the professional development of school nurses. Several school nurses have also showed an interest in being involved in the production. The idea of a series of podcasts was explored as an option to deliver information about key topics, being a medium of delivery which is relatively low-cost to produce and can be flexible to access at a time which suits the nurse.

How were the podcasts developed?

There is no shortage of passion and dedication in the school nursing workforce, alongside experience and knowledge. It was agreed that the podcasts needed to be engaging and relevant. The idea of podcasts for school nurses by school nurses was developed with the aim of inspiring the workforce, stimulating innovative ideas, and sharing good practice. To ensure that the focus of the podcasts was right, a call out to school nurses across the UK to select topics and to canvass volunteers who were willing to take part in the podcasts.

The production of the podcasts followed a relaxed, conversational style. A podcast production company was hired to provide technical guidance, and they recommended avoiding overly scripted content. Instead, the participants were provided with a general overview of the topic and a prompt sheet for the chairperson, ensuring the discussion stayed on track while allowing the conversation to flow naturally. The hosts, Sharon White (CEO of SAPHNA), Sallyann Sutton (Professional Officer at SAPHNA), and Laura Burrowes (Clinical Lead at DHTS), were joined by guest speakers from various regions, including Hampshire, Birmingham, Leeds, and even Cyprus. This range of voices enriched the discussions with diverse perspectives from across the UK.

Involving Children and Young People

A key aspect of the podcast development process was the inclusion of young people's voices. SAPHNA and DHTS pride themselves on co-producing materials, including those for professional development. The topics of the podcasts were driven by data on issues that children and young people contact school nurses for support. Data collected from ChatHealth,

which handled nearly 10,000 conversations between April 2023 and March 2024, provided a wealth of insight into the concerns of young people.

Additionally, the Health for Teens website, which offers age-appropriate information and advice for young people, had 289,070 visitors in 2022-2023, further highlighting the key issues that young people seek guidance on. These insights, combined with sound bites of children and young people's views and experiences—recorded by Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust for use on the Health for Teens website—were woven into the podcasts. For example, audio clips of young people discussing topics such as depression and what being healthy means to them gave the episodes a unique and authentic touch.

This co-production approach ensured that the podcasts did not just focus on theory but also reflected real-world experiences of the children and young people that school nurses work with, making the content more relatable and practical for listeners.

Evaluation and Outcomes

Measuring the success of podcasts as a medium for learning was a challenge. One approach was to gather information about the podcast downloads to understand the number of downloads and unique users. Due to GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) regulations, download information was anonymized, making it challenging to gain feedback from those who accessed the podcasts. Therefore, short surveys were sent out to the target audience to understand whether listeners enjoyed the series and whether it had an impact on their clinical practice (Newman et al., 2021).

Download Data

A webinar was held to announce the launch of the podcast series on the release date of the first two episodes. This was attended by 62 participants who were asked to complete an evaluation. The podcasts were promoted across the DHTS and SAPHNA social media channels and shared by other networks and accounts. More than 18,000 impressions happened on the ChatHealth channels alone.

The number of downloads has been monitored and have increased significantly following the launch. They became trending podcasts in the Apple Podcast Top Shows charts, reaching number 20 in the first week of release. A total of 2818 downloads been recorded. Across UK countries most listeners were from England, followed by Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. July data shows that 36% of the downloads have been listened to via Apple podcast, 20% Edge, 17% Spotify and 10% Google Chrome.

Table 1: Downloads by Country

Countries	Downloads	Percent
England	2260	88.45%
Scotland	179	7.01%
Wales	98	3.84%
Northern Ireland	18	0.7%

As of the 16th July 2024, the podcasts have been download 4,497 times. The most downloaded episode was 'What's the role of the School Nurse?', followed by 'Gender identity – what are the facts?'. Almost 88% of the downloads were from within the UK however the podcasts were accessed from countries across the world including the United States (8%) and a smaller number in countries including Japan, Australia, Cyprus, New Zealand and Canada.

Table 2. Downloads by Podcast

Title	Released	Downloads	% of all episodes
What's the role of the school nurse?	30 Jan 24	1,100	24.40
Gender Identity – What are the facts?	30 Jan 24	777	17.20
Healthy Lifestyles – What's the picture	6 Feb 24	557	12.30
Mental Health – How are kids feeling?	13 Feb 24	590	13.10
Safeguarding – How do we keep kids safe	20 Feb 24	575	12.70
School Nursing Uncovered Series Trailer	1 Dec 23	323	7.10
Vaping – What's happening	27 Feb 24	575	12.70

Survey Data

A survey was sent via email to those on the Digital Transformation Service mailing list requesting that they complete a short survey if they had listened to any of the podcasts. All respondents were school or public health nurses working in the NHS or Local Authority. All respondents had listened to more than 1 podcast, 30% had listened to all 6 episodes. 61% of respondents rated the content of the podcasts as very good, 38% as excellent. Similarly, the quality of the hosts, guests, length of the podcasts and relevance of the topics areas were rated as either very good or excellent. All of those who listened to the podcasts stated that they would recommend the podcasts to colleagues.

Most respondents listened to the podcasts because the topic was an area of interest and 84% wished to increase their knowledge about the topic. 38% of respondents reported that they accessed the podcasts as part of their personal and professional development and to increase their confidence in supporting children and young people. 1 participant stated that they listened to the podcast as they were intrigued to hear “what was being said about school nursing and how it was working in other areas”. Respondents were asked to their top share learning points having listened to the podcasts. There following points were the most commonly cited:

- The differences in school nursing service provision nationwide
- Similarities on the challenges and difficulties being experienced by School Nursing Teams
- Admiration of the passion in School Nursing
- Safeguarding pressures continues to be an issue in School Nursing.
- Greater understanding of how School Nurses can support in the topic areas discussed on the podcasts
- Supporting young people around gender identity, use of pronouns and gender-neutral language

Participants were asked how they will use the learning from the podcasts in their practice. The following themes emerged:

- Sharing the discussions in the podcasts with the wider team including leadership and students occurred.
- Possibly implements some of the discussion areas that were discussed in their local area and be a catalyst to implement change.
- How to improve services for young people and how to collaborate with them.

Those completing the survey requested a wide range of topic for future podcasts including: CSE grooming/county lines., gangs, knife crime, sexual health, school attendance issues, digital platforms, clinical supervision, skill mix, supporting parents of children with SEND, mental health and quality assurance.

Process Evaluation

It was important to evaluate the process of developing the podcasts. Therefore, feedback was provided by those taking part in the development and recording of the podcasts.

“This was such an uplifting experience to record the podcasts which involved lots of lively and passionate discussions, showcasing good practice and challenge. Fantastic to be sharing the ‘mic’ with knowledgeable and enthusiastic school nurses from around the country. The podcasts really articulate the value and show the impact that school nursing has on improving outcomes of children and young people.”

“What a fabulous experience, so pleased to hear and see so many positive and proactive school nurses.”

“Brilliantly organised, with a lovely buzz in the room before, during and after the podcasts. It was fantastic to network with others and do something different.”

“I really enjoyed meeting everyone and focusing on all things school nursing. It was really well organised and a pleasure to be part of. Thank you for a wonderful podcasting experience.”

Challenges

The podcasts were intended to support professional development and connect school nurses across the UK. Whilst the intended audience was school nurses and their teams, the podcasts were publicly accessible and prior to launch they were promoted across social media platforms.

At the time that the podcasts were being promoted and then launched, the Independent Review of Gender Identity Services was in progress, the final report being published in April 2024 (CASS, 2024). A consultation seeking views on guidance to support schools and colleges

to make considered and lawful decisions in relation to children who are questioning their gender and the wider school and college community, was also in progress. Due to the sensitivity of the gender identity topic, it was agreed by all to temporarily suspend the availability of the podcast prior to the general election and review this decision post-election.

Conclusion

Podcasts offer a flexible and accessible approach to professional development for school nurses, especially in a fast-evolving healthcare landscape. The success of this series highlights the passion and commitment within the school nursing community to stay informed and improve outcomes for children and young people. Moving forward, podcasts can play an even greater role in delivering cost-effective, widely accessible training that meets the demands of modern practice.

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